

## **Walking and talking with living texts: Breathing life against static standardisation**

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*ABSTRACT: Current educational reform, policy and public discourse emphasise standardisation of testing, curricula and professional practice, yet the landscape of literacy practices today is fluid, interactive, multimodal, ever-changing, adaptive and collaborative. How then can English and literacy educators negotiate these conflicting terrains? The nature of today's literacy practices is reflected in a concept of living texts which refers to experienced events and encounters that offer meaning-making that is fluid, interactive and changing. Literacy learning possibilities with living texts are described and discussed by the authors who independently investigated the place of living texts across two distinctly different learning contexts: a young people's community arts project and a co-taught multiliteracies project in a high school. In the community arts project, young people created living texts as guided walks of urban spaces that adapt and change to varying audiences. In the multiliteracies project, two parents and a teacher created interactive spaces through co-teaching and cogenerative dialoguing. These spaces generate living texts that yield a purposefully connected curriculum rich in community-relevant and culturally significant texts. These two studies are shared with a view of bringing living texts into literacy education to loosen rigidity in standardisation.*

*KEYWORDS: Anarchive, citizenship literacies, coexistence, co-teaching, cogenerative dialoguing, interrelationality, living texts, multiliteracies, walking.*

### **A CASE FOR LIVING TEXTS**

In this paper, we foreground texts that are living, moving beyond the narrow traditional emphasis on static documented and standardised print texts. Thus, we see living texts as communication and representation of meaning, delivered through relationality experienced in events and encounters. Living texts offer fluid meaning-making that is action-oriented, generative, authentic, open, relational, affective, responsive, ever-changing and engaging. Ontologically, we see living texts as: a) coexisting<sup>1</sup> with others, b) interrelational, and c) in constant unfolding processes of creation (generative).

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<sup>1</sup> No hyphen has been inserted to emphasise and acknowledge the merging of ideas, actions and creations that can occur when we are fully open to the shared agency of coexistence.

We recognise that texts do not exist in isolation but coexist in a dynamic world of diverse others, experiences, practices, artefacts and spaces. All of these influence text. Informed by new literacy studies (for example, Heath, 1983; Street, 1995), such a view of texts understands literacy as social practices that vary from one context to another, and what Street (2007) refers to as an ideological model of literacy, which recognises the ways people engage with text as “deeply rooted in conceptions of knowledge, identity and being” (p. 130). Recognition of coexistence also foregrounds the political in that everyone (children, families, teachers) involved in the learning are active contributors (for example, see Biesta, 2007), and that their political and participation rights are honoured and enacted, supporting powers for individuals and groups to work together cooperatively (Janoski, 1998). From a political conception, co-construction of literacy knowledge can be enabled through the interplay of initiated actions and supportive responses to those actions.

The interrelationality of living texts acknowledges the affective domain as posited in Whitehead’s (1929/1978) process philosophy, in which feeling is understood as relational and the basic condition of aesthetic experience. As Whitehead further explains, space and time are subjective conditions enmeshed in the affectivity of experience. Living texts are thus not separate, disconnected entities but rather are imbued with feeling that links people and places in time. Pedagogically, interrelationality in living texts welcomes each actor’s *funds of knowledge* (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992) – their social and cultural literacy practices and resources. In a space of interrelationality, there is openness to multiple lived experiences, interpretations and ways of being forged through cultivation of close relationships, attentive listening and reciprocal learning among teachers, learners and families. We also recognise that central to interrelationality is the idea of *engagement*. Engagement denotes “contact by fitting together; ...the meshing of gears” (Pushor & Ruitenberg, 2005, p. 13). Like gears that enable a car to run, an engaged individual is “integral” and “essential” to educational processes. When individuals engage side-by-side in the educational terrain, affect is welcomed and possibilities are created for power, decision-making and responsibility for teaching and learning to be shared among actors such as teachers, parents, students and community members (Willis, 2013). Hence, the agenda being served is mutually determined and mutually beneficial (Pushor & Ruitenberg, 2005).

The ontological assumption that texts are in constant unfolding processes of creation draws on Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) rhizomatic view in which connections are ceaselessly established “between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences and social struggles” (p. 8). What takes place is susceptible to constant modification and can be reworked by an individual, a group or a social formation. Our attention is thus drawn to the creative processes of text-making and meaning-making rather than the end product. In language and literacy, many have previously acknowledged the constant generative and creative processes at play. Chomsky (1986) suggested that all people have boundless aptitude for the creation of language. And Snyder (2008) summates that for more than a century, there has been growing recognition that living languages change as users create and shape texts according to shifting social and cultural practices. Carter (2004) concluded that creativity is a “pervasive feature of spoken language exchanges...possessed by all speakers and listeners” (p. 6) and is evidenced in creative deviations from a norm or familiar existing patterns. In reflection of the

digital literacy turn, Bruns (2008) coined the term *produsage* to describe how digital texts and online platforms readily provide the capacity for people to both consume and produce digital texts. Thus, the concept of living texts is interested in text in constant unfolding processes of creation in the here-and-now through coexistence and interrelationality and engagement with others.

## LIVING TEXTS AS ANARCHIVE AGAINST A CLIMATE OF STANDARDISATION

We draw from contemporary arts and political science to theoretically inform our case for living texts. In contemporary arts, we learn from the move away from a focus on materiality of art objects to the relational process between artwork and spectator, referred to as relational aesthetics by art critic Nicolas Bourriaud (2002). Such a shift was also provoked in literary criticism with Roland Barthes' (1977) argument for *writerly* text, where the authority of meaning shifts from the author to position the reader as an active constructor of meaning, enabling a proliferation of meanings. Emphasis is on the relational process between viewer/reader and artwork/text so that we make meaning from a relational space, a space that acknowledges our personal and felt connections with the text.

In political science, relationality is foregrounded in the concept of anarchy. Though readers may readily equate anarchy with chaos and disorder as is its colloquial meaning, we wish to apply anarchy according to its Greek origins in which *ana* means against and *archy* means rule. Disorder is implied in an ontological view that sees people as subjects needing to be ruled to enable order. However, anarchy seeks to minimise political authority and maximise individual autonomy (Lake, 2011), and through concern for individual autonomy amidst all, relational politics is foregrounded. It is the motivation for maximising individual autonomy for one another and minimising regulation and standardisation of English and literacy as dictated by state, national and global authorities with which we align, and embrace in our case for living texts. We are also allured by what Lessard (2009) describes as the indeterminacy of an anarchic space, which "opens up attractions, disjunctions, affinities, and relational assemblages" (p. 317). Indeterminacy is an exciting space to exist within, as it is alive with budding rhizomatic connections stimulating new ways of thinking, being and creating.

We see the relational and anarchic space of living texts as a refreshing counter experience to the global movement of increased standardisation and regulation of English and literacy education that this special issue examines. Calls for standardisation derive from a view that English and literacy standards are falling, as persistently decried in the Australian mainstream media (Luke, 2010) with headlines such as, "Australian students' literacy levels declining" (MacDonald, 2010), "Literacy failings due to ideology" (Lewis, 2013), and "Go back to basics and give literacy teaching more of a chance" (Donnelly, 2006) feeding widespread moral panic. Yet there is rarely any reference in these reports to research or literacy experts. Literacy education is widely considered public policy. Everyone has an opinion and touts him- or herself as an expert based on common-sense explanations (Snyder, 2008). Journalists and politicians, Snyder further explains, respond to perceptions of declining literacy standards with vehement pleas for standardisation in English and

literacy teaching and assessment as the only remedy. And since 2006, Australian federal governments have actively increased centralised control of school education through national testing (that is, the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy [NAPLAN]) and the development of a national curriculum. Uniformity and consistency have been perceived as a panacea for improving quality and standards. However, many have warned that Australians should learn from the experience of the UK and the US, who adopted national curricula and national standards based on a narrow view of literacy as a set of technical skills, only to attain mediocre results in PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) (Snyder, 2008).

Centralised control and reclaiming old ways of English and literacy instruction continue to dominate public debates and policy regarding literacy, as the weight of national testing (for example, NAPLAN) and curriculum (Australian Curriculum: English) requirements escalates. This weight is further pronounced in Queensland, with its government school *Curriculum to Classroom* (C2C) prescriptive resources. These measures continue to regulate and restrain English and literacy education, rather than provide space for creative possibilities for change such as we envisage with our case for living texts. Derrida's (1996) understanding of how regulations are used offers some useful insight to the growing trend for centralised control of English and literacy education. Derrida understood regulations along with conventions and institutions as stabilisations, in that they stabilise the chaotic or the potential for the chaotic.

The growing diversity and multiplicity of English and literacy can be experienced as overwhelming and chaotic. And the notion of living texts that we describe as existing in anarchic spaces may be deemed as risking chaos by those who privilege a ruled-and-regulated world. Many have sought to control the increasing breadth and diversity of English and literacy today (widely recognised and referred to as encompassing a *multiliteracies* approach (The New London Group, 1996)) with standardisation. One narrow slice of English and literacy is authorised and much of the great breadth of diversity that is constantly evolving through our real-time, virtual, global and everyday meaning-making is denied (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012). Governments are thus endeavouring to “condition the unconditionality” (Derrida, 2005, p. 81) of the wildly organic and dynamic nature of Englishes and literacies today with stabilising forces of standardised testing and curricula. Derrida (2005) saw chaos as offering both “a risk and a chance and it is here that the possible and the impossible cross each other” (p. 86). So, by taking the risk of being open to chaos, divergent possibilities can rhizomatically shoot in multiple directions. It is this view of chaos and the nature of Englishes and literacies that we see enormous potential for the relational anarchic spaces of living texts.

We further propose that living texts be read as *anarchive*, that is, against (ana) archive. The tension between an anarchic impulse and the imperative impulse of order in archiving is captured by synthesising anarchy and archive (Lessard, 2009). Lessard explored the concept of *anarchive* in the pioneering digital archiving of video and media artists titled *Anarchive* supervised by Anne-Marie Duguet, which provoked rethinking and critical questioning of digital archiving. For Lessard, relational aesthetics (Bourriaud, 2002) and their central role of preserving and appreciating cultural memories are foregrounded in anarchive. We see that living texts defy the

order of archiving that preserves, defines, classifies and standardises what is and can be English and literacy education, by honouring the cultural and affective richness of lived relational, emergent, indeterminate encounters. Springgay (2014) proposes anarchiving as “approaching matter from new perspectives in order to uncover unprecedented relationships between the works...to stimulate new nodes of production” (p. 3). So if we see living texts as anarchive, emphasis is not just simply on the relational experience but on the potential for new nodes of production, on what emerges, new ways of doing, being and knowing. Springgay thus reinforces that anarchive is a shift away from the material object (for example, documents, letters, video, photos) to engendered events (relational experiences) to create novel assemblages.

Living texts as anarchive defy being captured. They exist in the moment as relational anarchic encounters with great potential for budding anew. To further explain and explore this notion, the following section provides examples from empirical studies. However, to truly understand lived texts one must be in the experience. What we offer is a meagre retelling of our respective lived experiences of what we read as living texts—limited by our word choice—to illustrate the moments so that readers may imagine the lived affective encounter. Each living text occurs only once, as they are open to ongoing interconnections, intersections and interrelationships in response to changing actors, times, environments and cultures.

## LIVING TEXTS IN PRACTICE

To breathe life against the *staticity* of standardisation, we offer examples of living texts that reflect and embrace the diversity and multiplicity of today’s English and literacy through everyday acts of walking and talking. The first example examines lived experiences of *The Walking Neighbourhood hosted by Children*—a social practice art project in which primary school-aged children led adults on walks of known neighbourhoods. The second example shows how cogenerative dialoguing during a co-teaching venture involving a high-school teacher and two parents exemplifies living texts. In both examples we highlight the interrelationality and constant unfolding processes of creation that flourish in coexistence with others in anarchic spaces in which each individual’s agency is welcomed.

### Child-led urban walks as living texts

In this section, Louise argues for children’s street literacies to be acknowledged as living texts. Due to widespread public concern for child safety in western societies, children have little access to public spaces; they are typically confined to the private worlds of home and school (Roche, 1999). There is clear demarcation of child and adult spaces with close adult chaperoning and chauffeuring of children between these spaces. Such practices and the socially imposed delineation of space override and limit children’s participation in the public sphere. It was these social concerns that provoked the creation of the social practice arts project, *Walking Neighbourhood hosted by Children* by the community cultural development organisation, Contact Inc. The work is intentionally provocative and political by performing a shift in social practice with children leading adults on an affective lived experience of curated neighbourhood walks, that we propose are read as living texts.

To date, the *Walking Neighbourhood Hosted by Children* project has taken place in Fortitude Valley, Brisbane in 2012, and 2014 (see Hickey & Phillips, 2013; Phillips, 2013; Phillips & Hickey, 2013), Chiang Mai, Thailand in 2013, and Bagot, Darwin in 2013.

The following discussion draws data from the two Brisbane versions of the project. A group of 12 eight to 12-year old children were recruited through arts worker and researcher networks for the 2012 iteration. Ten of these children returned for a second iteration in 2014 along with three newcomers. The project's intent was to foreground children's place, interest and inclusion in public spaces. Brisbane's Fortitude Valley is a neighbourhood commonly perceived as child unfriendly and marketed as an adult entertainment district. It is therefore not publicly perceived as a children's space. Through walking, all participants (that is, children, arts workers, audience, researchers) cointerpreted knowledge gained through a lived relational experience and offered a way of becoming a "citizen", involving negotiation and regard for others (Springgay, 2011). *Walking Neighbourhood Hosted by Children* became a public event that operated out of the *Judith Wright Centre for Contemporary Arts* and attracted 330 audience members in 2012, and approximately 200 invited performing arts delegates in 2014, with each child leading two to four walks at each scheduled public performance with groups of three to 10 walkers. The child-curated walks foregrounded children's interests, streetscape observations, and funds of knowledge, and showcased the growth in the breadth and strength of the children's citizenship literacy practices. To open a window into the literacy practices of *The Walking Neighbourhood* child hosts, the following section discusses evidence of living texts in both the workshops for the development of child-curated neighbourhood walks and the public walks themselves.

For the children to develop a neighbourhood walk of Brisbane's Fortitude Valley, arts workers facilitated six workshops that involved whole- and small-group walks of the local streets, discussions on what children noticed on the walks and what interested them, drawing and writing about walk observations, role-plays of neighbourhood interactions and interactive drama (bonding) games. In the second half of the workshop series, the arts workers spent more time conversing with each child to choose a walk destination, assess and address logistics of her or his walk, and build ideas for engaging an adult audience for the walk's duration.

Walking alongside these children and hearing their commentaries on their engagement with the urban space produced rich living texts that demonstrated awareness of political coexistence, interrelationality and rapid unfolding processes of creation. The following provides a transcript of Paige's<sup>2</sup> (a 10-year-old girl) commentary whilst walking from the Chinatown district of Brisbane's Fortitude Valley back to the *Judith Wright Centre for Contemporary Arts*.

**Paige:** *There's a Chinese restaurant. Ummm. Trash monkeeys!! You can just see the bridge. Ju-u-st. There's a shop called Re-Sa-Char – [the group looks at the sign which reads "ReSaChy"] Resachy, Resachy [she repeats as she works on correcting her pronunciation]. There's a car about to hit us [uttered in casual light tone]. [Paige looks at building across road wall.] Are they plants or nests?*

<sup>2</sup> All children in this study consented to their first names being used in publications.

**Louise:** *They're big hanging baskets. That place is called Cloudland.*

**Paige:** *There's the police*

**Louise:** *Ahh, you can see the police sign*

**Paige:** *There is another car that is about to hit us. Oh, pizza! Pie face! Everything! Yay! Kebabs, pizza and chips. Dragonberry – Oh, look at those shoes.* [Two other 10-year old girls from the project are also looking in Dragonberry's shop window.]

**Lily:** *Look at those ones with the flowers on them.*

**Paige:** *Oh yeah! Look at those snake ones. Look at those ones on the black shoebox.*

[Then the group of children spot a gelati store next door and all enter and they are offered samples.]

**Paige:** *Oh, marshmallow.*

[The group of children are given tastes of gelati on plastic spoons.]

[All the children chorus at one]: *Thank you.*

[Then from the gelati store streams the xylophone intro of Gotye's, "*Somebody that I used to know*" and children collectively exclaim]: *"I love this song."*

**Paige:** *Oh, this is so yummy. This is for the movie Batman* [spoken to her friend Mali – a 10-year-old boy, who is taking photographs with an iPod touch and is known to have a keen interest in Batman]. *I just got a double chocolate chip ice cream for the movie "Batman".* (10/7/12)

The walk along Ann and Brunswick Streets offered a wide breadth of sensory stimulation via a multitude of texts for decoding and meaning-making. The above transcript provides a brief mono-modal capture of a 10-year-old girl's verbalised commentary as she walked along decoding and making meaning of the text-saturated urban landscape. Paige read signs (for example, ReSaCha), symbols (for example, the blue- and white-chequered pattern for police), visual features (for example, the top of a bridge tower), instrumental cues of songs, and friends' actions. And she rapidly switched from decoding and making meaning of one mode to another. This is what Kalantzis and Cope (2012) refer to as *synaesthesia*: a "process of shifting backwards and forwards between different modes of meaning" (p. 195). The process is dynamic as one code after another is decoded and meanings are extracted in rapid succession. ]

What is happening though is incredibly complex and profound. Paige is drawing from a breadth of prior knowledges including landscape features, symbols and friends' interests to interpret the sensory input to which she adds a sprinkling of humour (for example, "There's a car about to hit us") and imagination (for example, "This is for the movie *Batman*"). The sudden, and what appears random reference to Batman is creative, as Paige has rapidly combined sensory input of her friend with a recording device and prior knowledge of his frequent reference to Batman to imply that he is making a Batman movie in which she has just been recorded. Paige took input from her friend, related to him and created new forms and meanings that deviated from the norm, convention or expected, producing a living text through unfolding processes of creation via coexistence with others and practices of interrelationality.

In 2014, Bella (aged 13) had a very precise political agenda for her curated walk. She constructed a highly affective living text, which we attempt to convey to readers through words and still images. Bella led a group of seven adults and began on the noisy Brunswick Street footpath, saying to her audience: "Hello, I'm Bella, I'm 13 years old and I'll be your guide for today. When I moved to Australia in June of 2011, Mum bought us baby chickens from my brother's day care. I raised the four chickens from chicks to hens and roosters and I told them everything that was happening in my life. They were like my best friends." With a slightly embarrassed grimace she



offered: “Well I was only in fifth grade. Then one night a fox slaughtered the chickens. It was so-o-o horrible. In memory of the hens, I bought a necklace and had their names carved on it. Then we started fostering ex-battery hens, to get them ready for *forever homes*. With fostering we were able to help a lot of chickens instead of just a few. We did this for nearly two years.” By now Bella has led her audience left into Robertson Street, entering a cleared gravelled parking area at the back of a row of run-down, two-storey residences. Bella led us into a small cramped space under a stairwell that had dirt, sticks, leaves, rubbish – even semi-decayed chicken bones – on the concrete floor. It was an unpleasant space, one that you might be prepared to pass through but are prickled with discomfort when led to stand there in close proximity to unknown others.

Bella then proceeded: “Three to four battery hens are crammed into a cage with floor space for each hen the size of an A4-piece of paper with only wiring underfoot so their toes get caught and injured and all their faeces falls through the wire and it is not cleared for a year.” A man in her audience shakes his head, verifying: “Did you say a year?” “Yes a year, the odour is re-e-ally pungent. The guy who rescues them told me it makes him wretch. When the females are a few weeks old they get their beaks chopped off (to stop them pecking each other) with a sharp blade without anaesthesia. It is like chopping a finger off a baby. When we fostered ex-battery hens they had grey eyes from lack of sunlight, cut-off beaks so they have a lot of trouble eating as beaks don’t grow back, and they don’t have any feathers from stress, heat and fights from other hens.” Interspersed through Bella’s verbal descriptions of the treatment of battery hens, she flashed A4 printed images of featherless battery hens, beakless battery hens, chickens crammed in boxed cage-upon-cage-upon-cage in rows-upon-rows stacked six cages high. The audience stood silent.

Bella then led her audience to a wire-mesh fence where there were cardboard letters that spelt “liberation”, and invited us to write a single word/symbol in response to what she had shared.



**Figure 1. Bella’s walking group writing responses on liberation letters**

The different audiences (across multiple experiences of Bella’s walks) wrote: “stressed”, “unfair”, “sad”, “trapped”, “guilty”, “dirty”, “greed”, “outraged”, “brutal”, “confused”, “perplexed”, “condemned”, “impudent”, and “shocked”. One questioned:



“Where is our empathy?” And another declared: “Chickens have souls too” (see Figure 2). Following this personal reflective moment, in an effort to lift the melancholic mood that hung over the audience, Bella offered boiled free-range eggs all round.



**Figure 2. Audience-written responses to Bella’s liberation walk**

As the group walked back up to Brunswick Street, Bella shared: “If there’s anything I want you to take back, it’s to buy free-range eggs, because it’s only an extra two dollars and it’s worth it for the wellbeing of these wonderful animals. Believe me, I know it first-hand.” The audience nodded and relayed their lived experiences with chickens.

The above description of Bella’s liberation walk provides a condensed print-textual representation of what we propose can be read and appreciated as a living text. By their very nature, living texts need to be experienced live so as to absorb the full suite of sensorial input, social dimension and affective impact. Solnit (2000) beautifully recognises these qualities in walking as “a state in which the mind, the body, and the world are aligned, as though they were three characters finally in conversation together, three notes suddenly make a chord” (p. 5).

The full experience of a child-led walk cannot be given justice within a written word article, though photographs have been included to assist with conceptualising and imagining. What we hope though is that readers may recognise in the narrative of Bella’s liberation walk the ways she orchestrated the experience to enhance affectivity. Her choice of site for sharing the brutality of the battery-hen industry was purposeful, along with her choice of words and imagery. Standing in that unpleasant small space crowded in with unknown others, hearing and seeing one violent account after another affected the whole self, leaving a lasting imprint. The walk was curated and led by Bella with purpose to provoke awareness of the plight of battery hens. Each time Bella led the walk it was shaped by the subjective conditions of space and time and the selves that each audience member brought to the experience, as acknowledged in Whitehead’s (1929/1978) processes of becoming. We, the authors, also particularly appreciated the opportunity given to the audience to express their affective responses in the poetic form of single words or phrases that respects coexistence with others as in accordance with an ideological model of literacy (see Street, 2007) and that recognises engagement with text as deeply connected with knowledge, identity and being. The opportunity to write a single word was well-placed, affording each person space to process and capture their understanding of how the experience affected them in that moment-in-time in that place. Bella’s timing of offering eggs was also well-placed to cultivate a shift in feelings, highlighting what Whitehead (1929/1978) referred to about space and time as subjective conditions of the affectivity of aesthetic experience.

By engaging with the highly multimodal and dynamic urban landscape of Brisbane's Fortitude Valley, the participating children experienced literacies as political coexistence in a dynamic interrelational world of diverse others, experiences, practices, artefacts and spaces. Through pedagogical practices that cultivated openness and respect for one's own and others' funds of knowledge, welcoming agency for all, interrelationality was cultivated and alive in each living text. The child hosts developed urban citizenship literacies such as sourcing information on urban spaces, initiating conversations with adults, negotiating road crossings, explaining rules, processes and art forms, and commanding the attention of a group of unknown others through constant unfolding processes of creation. The living texts that each child host created constantly changed, being created and recreated, in response to audience variation for each iteration of their walk, landscape and pedestrian variation, climate, mood, thought processes and degree of hunger and fatigue.

Although *The Walking Neighbourhood Hosted by Children* was an orchestrated social practice art outside of school education, the concept could be applied in schools blurring the boundaries between school and community, through the sharing of local knowledge from a space of belonging. Child-led walks offer space for the complexity of English and literacy usage that young people possess to be foregrounded, so that we hear from young people what Englishes and literacies are to them. Thus, we advocate for greater recognition of the rich learning that can occur in and through living texts as constant unfolding processes of creation; a shift away from an emphasis on outcomes and archiving (documenting evidence). In essence, we suggest that young people's English and literacy are foregrounded through political pedagogical practice in anarchic spaces, in which young people, educators, families and community members may all participate as social actors. The following section illustrates this with a year-eight class.

### **Cogenerative dialogues as living texts**

In this section, Linda argues for living texts produced in anarchical spaces during cogenerative dialoguing to enable engagement by recognising and respecting the participation rights of educational actors such as parents and teachers for enhancing student learning. There is consistent convincing evidence across the relevant literature highlighting the benefits of parent involvement in their children's education (for example, Epstein, 1995; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Lightfoot, 2003). Accordingly, most Australian schools actively pursue home-school links that include a range of parent programs and initiatives (for example, Muller & Associates, 2009). The Australian federal government also continues its commitment to embedding parental engagement in schools through professional engagement with parents and community members defined as one of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership [AITSL], 2014). However, Holmes (2009) asserts that traditional parent-school involvement and participation practices (for example, volunteering, fundraising, school council membership) constitute the norm in Australian schools, while engagement remains the exception. In speaking about engagement, Pushor (2001) highlights the need to establish new interrelational school spaces to enable parents to share in knowledge, voice, responsibility and decision-making in coexistence with educators. She maintains that without these spaces, it is unlikely that parents will be able to contribute meaningfully to those aspects of their children's school education from which they have been

traditionally excluded (for example, curriculum planning and enactment). We therefore advocate creating opportunities for anarchical spaces that include parents and teachers engaging together with students in constant processes of creation to produce living texts that can enrich teaching and learning English and literacy in schools.

Linda investigated the phenomenon of co-teaching and cogenerative dialoguing in an Australian high school as an innovative approach to parent-teacher engagement. Co-teaching was deployed according to Murphy and Scantlebury's (2010) definition as two or more teachers sharing responsibility for meeting student learning needs and simultaneously seeking to learn from all involved. Unlike other joint teaching practices such as "team teaching", co-teaching expressly brings together the collective expertise of several individuals to continually expand and deepen student learning opportunities (Roth & Tobin, 2005). An essential component of co-teaching is cogenerative dialoguing, which was instituted collaboratively with this study's participants as an interactive social space for them to talk, listen and learn from one another across such boundaries as age, gender and educational background.

The study's participants were John, a teacher, and Dale and Ruth,<sup>3</sup> two parents of students in John's Year-8 English and Studies of Society and Environment (SoSE)<sup>4</sup> class (27 students approximately 13 years old) (Willis, 2013). Although Linda participated as a co-teacher, her study focused on how co-teaching and cogenerative dialoguing enabled engagement between the parents and teacher. Initially, John invited all of his students' parents to meet with him to learn about the phenomenon. After expressing interest and further discussing the concept, Dale and Ruth agreed to co-teach with John – an eight-month-long arrangement. Their collaboration began with co-teaching the topic, *War and Refugees*, for which planning took 13 weeks and enactment, nine. English and SoSE were timetabled weekly for five, 35-minute teaching episodes. The parents joined John each week to co-teach one 70-minute block, emailing between times, so all participants were knowledgeable about the successes or changes in cogenerated plans. After each co-teaching episode, the participants dialogued cogeneratively for around 90 minutes.

The *War and Refugees* topic was school-mandated study for Year 8. Although John was provided a teacher resource guide and reproducible student workbooks, he enjoyed flexibility with curriculum development. Linda discussed with John the possibility of adopting the *Learning by Design* framework (comprising the knowledge processes: experiencing, conceptualising, analysing and applying) together with multiliteracies pedagogy (Kalantzis, Cope, & the Learning by Design Project Group, 2005) – an idea subsequently adopted by the parents for co-teaching.

Before co-teaching in the classroom, cogenerative dialoguing positioned the parents and teacher in new anarchical spaces: conversations welcomed each other's agency, where all views and ideas as well as inclusive respectful practices (for example, suspending judgement) were actively encouraged. John initiated ideas for enacting an inquiry-style, multiliteracies approach for co-teaching the topic, explaining that coplanning was not to "work out a body of knowledge that the students need to know

<sup>3</sup> All names in this section except the author are pseudonyms.

<sup>4</sup> At the time of Linda's study, SoSE in Queensland comprised learning areas such as History, Geography, Civics and Citizenship, Indigenous Studies, and Environmental Education.

and just present it”; rather it was “getting students more involved in their own learning” so they could develop “deeper and broader learning” and then “share it with others” (Cogenerative dialogue, June, 27, 2008).

During early cogenerative dialogues, John also signalled to Dale and Ruth that their knowledge and experiences of families, schools, students, work and the world generally were valued and important, as was their capacity to participate in and contribute to effective planning processes. The openness of these sessions encouraged brainstorming, enabling the co-teachers to explore ways of linking known and new knowledge about the topic for the students. An excerpt from the first cogenerative dialogue is illustrative. The co-teachers discussed the issue of refugees living communally in unsanitary disease-ridden camps, when Dale, a medical scientist by profession, suggested:

**Dale:** *I could give them a lab perspective on diseases. I have to think how I could do it. But yeah, because we have slides*

**John:** *We have laboratories here and we could organise to swap*

**Dale:** *Microscopes?*

**John:** *Yeah, we could organise some and have a laboratory for a lesson or two.*

**Dale:** *Yeah, I mean I could. Give me time to think about it....I'm sure I could come up with something to talk about but, I mean in terms of getting resources, like I could probably speak to work and get some slides to show the children and stuff like that. Like it wouldn't be contagious or anything like that....*

**Ruth:** *Yeah, see that's where we could go to the science lab.*

**John:** *You see, we've got four weeks before we get into this. So we've got two weeks of holidays, four weeks of mapping. So we've got eight weeks before...*

**Dale:** *Oh, we can think about/even if it's not to do with the microscope. Even if I was to have pictures of what's down the microscope. That might be even better in terms of timeframes, but I could certainly do something that would be of interest*

**John:** *They have class sets of microscopes that are designed to be taken to classrooms so if you were to bring in slides of actual malaria parasites.*

**Ruth:** *Yeah, that'd be cool. That'd be a lot more exciting than a picture.*

**Dale:** *Yeah, but malaria's rare. But let me think about it. I'd have to work out how I could arrange it but that could be something. (Cogenerative dialogue, June 27, 2008)*

Coexisting with others during cogenerative dialoguing exemplifies the living texts we seek to promote. The excerpt shows how the co-teachers participated actively, sharing information, exploring alternative ideas, clarifying (mis)understandings, contemplating new ways of thinking, drawing on prior experiences, probing possibilities, considering challenges of suggestions, discussing possible teaching and learning practices, reaching mutual decisions, and offering encouragement. Hence, despite traditional role disparities and power differentials, these relational spaces encouraged moment-by-moment unfolding processes, paradoxically taking the participants into new indeterminate territory yet building their concrete individual and collective agency for teaching and learning about the topic.

Ultimately, cogenerative dialoguing gave rise to a co-taught laboratory session led by Dale that saw the students participate in a range of hands-on activities on three diseases commonly associated with refugees: cholera, malaria and tuberculosis. An important focus for the co-teachers was scaffolding the English and literacy demands of texts on diseases (for example, scientific terminology, the language of clinical notes, structure of information and scientific reports). As well, the co-teachers

facilitated the development of the students' critical literacy skills. For example, Dale noted about the diseases:

We can all get them. It's not just because they're refugees. If we were living in the same environment under the same conditions that they do we ourselves can get it as well, so it's not just because they're refugees. It's because of where they live and their environment and the climate that they live in. (Co-taught episode, August 15, 2008)

For the students, Dale's comments meaningfully connected refugees' experiences to not only the real world but also people's shared humanity.

However, what proves significant is how her comments drew from cogenerated understandings among the participants over preceding weeks – now reworked for the new social context of the co-taught classroom. This modification, as well as customisation, reflects Delueze and Guattari's (1987) rhizomatic view of unfolding processes of creation as well as affectivity in Whitehead's (1929/1978) process philosophy. The example shows the affective impact of living texts and their potential to generate powerful ways of knowing, thinking and being, first by establishing chains of connections among the co-teachers, then the students. At the same time, Dale's words encapsulated Lake's (2011) view of anarchy as minimising political authority and maximising individual autonomy for one another as she constructed her identity (and potentially the students') as a global citizen concerned for the wellbeing of all in the co-taught classroom and beyond.

Cogenerative dialoguing to co-plan using a multiliteracies approach continually breathed life into co-taught sessions. For example, the co-teachers brainstormed ideas and activities that saw the students: recounting personal stories of immigration to Australia, sharing learnings from print-based texts such as *Boy Overboard* (Gleitzman, 2004), and discussing different digital platforms and meaning modes including ways these may be exploited in texts to enhance meaning-making. Several classroom visits by others considered able to shed light on the topic also emanated from cogenerative sessions. These included a Federal Member of Parliament and a refugee advocate, who each challenged the students to think critically yet differently about the moral dilemmas surrounding refugees by posing questions such as: "Should refugees be sent home after wars have finished in their countries?"

Perhaps the most memorable visitor was a 16-year-old Afghani refugee, Khalid, whose father, fearing Taliban reprisals because he worked for the United Nations, fled to Australia, spending six years in Woomera Detention Centre before seeing his family again. Answering the students' questions, Khalid told his story:

**Khalid:** *We left Afghanistan in 2001. We came to Pakistan with my grandfather with some money my dad had left for us.*

**Chris:** *Why did you leave Afghanistan?*

**Khalid:** *We were forced to leave. It wasn't safe for us to stay there. We left everything, our house. We had a better life than we have in Australia in Afghanistan but we had to leave it because we would die; we knew we would die if we stayed there.*

**Phillip:** *How does it feel to be a refugee?*

**Khalid:** *Sometimes it doesn't feel so good because you're recognised as a person who doesn't have a country to stay in and he has to beg other countries to give him shelter so, but now for me, it's good because Australian government has let us stay and has accepted what we wanted and has given us a new life.*

**Pam:** *How is life different here?*

**Khalid:** *Not scared of going outside at night because in Afghanistan after five or six at night you're not allowed to go out. If they do they might get killed or something.... They might kidnap you and sell you to the smugglers and send you to Saudi Arabia and places. There are pirates.*

**John (teacher):** *Is there anything else you would like to share?*

**Khalid:** *Yeah, I miss my friends in Afghanistan. I'd like to tell you that we all are human beings so we have to support each other, respect each other and respect each other's beliefs. (Co-teaching episode, August 19, 2008)*

Afterward the students reported surprise when Khalid painted a picture of his previous life as “better” than Australia, as well as shock when he described a world of kidnappers and smugglers. Ruth later captured the affective impact of Khalid’s story on all in the classroom, commenting: “You could really *feel* his feelings”. Her words summon Whitehead’s (1929/1978) notion that by acknowledging the subjectivity of place and time, feeling is at the heart of aesthetic experience and cultivates interrelationality. Hence, the encounter challenged the students’ (and co-teachers’) stereotypical views of refugees, compelling them to contemplate taken-for-granted aspects of their own lives.

Experiences such as Khalid’s visit expanded the co-teachers’ individual and collective agency for cogenerating ways students might undertake their multiliteracies-style inquiry and re-present their learning. Cogenerative dialogues were seed-beds for decision-making, as the co-teachers drew on more funds of knowledge than when they first entered these anarchic spaces. These now included: knowledge of the students’ encounters with diverse others and myriad experiences in learning about the topic as well as the skills they had built for engaging with a range of text types and meaning modes, knowledge of a multiliteracies approach (for example, purpose, different phases), and knowledge of one another and the students during co-teaching and cogenerative dialoguing (for example, practices, participation preferences) (Willis, 2013).

Speaking with Linda, John now compared cogenerative dialoguing to “popcorn popping” (Informal conversation, September 17, 2008). He elaborated:

*You have a sense of your thinking being geared. When you plan by yourself, you're in first gear but when you plan with somebody you get more than just gear one and gear two, you sort of get gear three. That's because ideas bounce off ideas, bounce off ideas, and it's sort of exponential. It really takes things to another level, to another dimension. (Informal conversation, September 17, 2008)*

John’s description illuminates Pushor and Ruitenberg’s (2005) notion of engagement as fundamental to living texts. These conversations transformed traditional parent-teacher interactions, defying the order of archiving (Lessard, 2009) and creating ever-new production nodes (Springgay, 2014) and rhizomatic growth (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) through relational, reciprocal, dynamic, shifting and unfolding processes (Willis, 2013). For John, cogenerative dialoguing was not merely exciting but

materially catalytic for realising teaching and learning possibilities that he could only dream about on his own.

One such possibility was cogenerative dialogue-inspired ideas for how the students could re-present their learning. As non-government aid organisation (NGO) workers in a war-torn country, they adopted different roles to research the question: What problems and impacts does the refugee situation create? The students worked in groups to produce hybridised texts. Together with the co-teachers, they explored written linguistic, visual, gestural, spatial, audio, tactile and oral modes, probing critical connections between text production and consumption for different sociocultural contexts and purposes. For example, when determining which perspectives to foreground, they not only considered different sources but also possible underlying motives and interests of these sources; when developing presentation formats, they evaluated the effectiveness of different text types, digital platforms and meaning modes (and combinations) for their purposes (for example, why choose a poster not a song? employ imperative not declarative mood? adopt symbols not pictures?). The product of one group's (Education Officers) investigations and decision-making is depicted below (see Figure 3). The group developed an aesthetically attractive yet culturally sensitive and user-friendly Education Pack (see below) comprising brochures and CD-ROM to inform NGO workers of infectious diseases and landmines.



**Figure 3. The Education Pack: One student group's hybridised text**

In a final interview, John spoke about cogenerative dialoguing with the parents using a multiliteracies approach:

I think if I had given a copy of the student workbook to the parents on the first day then they would have seen that as, "That's the way we need to teach it." Whereas we came at it from the point of view that we need to teach the students about refugees; we've got to get the students to understand these sorts of things and without the booklet there their minds could run wild and eventually we ran wild with the class. (Semi-formal interview, December 9, 2008)

For John, adopting the school's prepared program with its inherent one-size-fits-all directive approach would not only have narrowed the curriculum but also stymied the co-teachers' and ultimately the students' imagination and creativity. Hence, cogenerative dialoguing exemplifies our notion of living texts. John recognised that co-teaching with parents represented "a risk and a chance" (Derrida, 2005, p. 86). By taking the risk and opening himself to the potential of Derrida's chaos, he and the



parents ultimately “ran wild with the class” (Semi-formal interview, December 9, 2008). The phenomenon positioned the parents and teacher not as separate, disconnected entities but coexisting one-with-another in anarchic spaces that ceaselessly generated unfolding processes of knowing, thinking and being. Together with the students, they lived engagement, exploiting a dynamic interrelational world of diverse individuals (in-and-beyond the classroom), experiences, practices, artefacts and spaces in reciprocally beneficial ways. Simultaneously, the co-taught classroom encouraged all involved to mutually respond to meaning-making and text construction opportunities and challenges in a proliferation of ways, affording them the potential to chart their own individual and collective, (multi)literacy futures. Cogenerative dialoguing thus ignited a wildly organic process, illustrating living texts as a powerful way for speaking against the pervasive staticity encouraged by prescriptive curricula and high-stakes standardised testing that might seek to archive today’s Englishes and literacies.

## CLOSING WORDS

Our idea of living texts breathes life against the staticity of standardisation. We offer the notion of living texts as a counter narrative to standardisation in English and literacy education that has political, humane and creative purpose. The foregrounding of living texts is political in that they are formed through coexistence with others in anarchic spaces, which welcomes and honours each participant’s rights and agency. Living texts are cogenerated and co-negotiated. No one version of English or literacy is privileged (standardisation); rather multiplicity and diversity are embraced and celebrated. Living texts are humane, in that they acknowledge that we are humans who walk and talk and live and breathe and feel. We are not static. We cannot be standardised. But rather we engage in interrelational and affective practices connected in time and place. Thus we argue that living texts are authentic, responsive and relational. The constant unfolding processes of creation in living texts places emphasis on the creative process rather than attention on achievement of outcomes. The creative process is action-oriented, generative, affective, open and ever-changing, enabling rich, deep learning for all participants, that is far more all-encompassing and authentic than any pre-determined mandated body of curriculum.

Our case for living texts celebrates learning in the moment, defying the order of archiving that preserves, defines, classifies and standardises what is and can be English and literacy education. Living texts as anararchives honour the cultural and affective richness of lived, relational, emergent, indeterminate encounters. Far from being chaotic and disorderly, anarchic indeterminate spaces of living texts are energised with affectivity and ongoing processes of thinking, being and creating which cultivate critical, creative, engaged, relational learners.

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